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ABSTRACT

A comparison of mainstream and feminist theories to explain women's attainment of education in developed and emerging countries as it relates to individual achievement and life chances is presented. The questions of access to schooling and the years of education attained have become two critical indicators of women's progress. Mainstream theories about inequality are gender-blind and do not attempt to explain gender differences in education. They take social class as the main variable. Feminist perspectives do consider women as a main social construct, but they vary in the role they attribute to the state, the family, and the school system in the process of change. Three feminist theories are examined in detail: liberal feminist, radical feminist, and socialist feminist. The socialist feminist theories appear to offer explanations for the present conditions characterizing women's inequality in education. In conclusion, it is suggested that it is unlikely educational gender inequalities will wither away as long as patriarchy and the capitalist mode of production reinforce each other. Notes and 28 references are attached. (LMS)

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GENDER DISPARITIES IN EDUCATIONAL ACCESS AND ATTAINMENT:

MAINSTREAM AND FEMINIST THEORIES

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Education, despite its imperfections, is one of the most easily accessible resources for women. Although evidence from developed countries (mainly the U.S., through the studies by Coleman et al., 1966, and Jencks et al., 1972) indicates that socioeconomic background has a greater influence than school characteristics on individual achievement and life chances, findings from developing countries (notably Heyneman and Jameson, 1980, and the IEA studies, represented in Comber and Keeves, 1973, and Thorndike, 1973) show that school-related factors are significant determinants of learning and occupational status, and that they play an even greater role in the success of students from poor family and rural environments.

For those concerned with the education of women, the questions of access to schooling and years of education attained become two critical indicators of women's progress. If women are not enrolled in school or if they fail to complete a given cycle of education, the potential role of education in the transmission of skills or knowledge necessary for their liberation becomes moot.

Women's access to education, judging from the rate of female literacy, has been improving over time. Serious gender disparities, however, still exist in West Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, regions in which the proportion of women with no education is between 14 and 21 percentage points greater than that of men. The enrollment of women in primary and secondary school has improved in the last 30 years, as "women have augmented their average years of schooling by around .6 more than males have" (Horn and Arriagada, 1986, p. 17). While several countries have made progress in evening the percentages of men and women that have access to primary and secondary education,

it remains elusive for a large number of countries in the Third World: women's enrollment in primary and secondary education is lower than that of men by at least 10 percentage points in 66 of 108 developing countries and higher in only 8 countries (Sivard, 1985). Most countries--developed and developing--show imbalances at the university level: not only are attendance percentages of women considerably lower than those of men but they tend to concentrate in a handful of disciplines, usually those identified as "feminine" and commanding weaker rewards in terms of wages and prestige.

Bowman and Anderson remarked several years ago that the rate of educational participation of women is "the least common denominator of worldwide statistics" (1980, p. 12). The situation has improved somewhat, but there is still a sizable number of countries that do not collect statistics by sex, indicating thereby that they do not consider the equality of women a priority.

In observing gender educational disparities, it is clear that we are confronting a phenomenon that affects women across societies and levels of development. Educational access and attainment of women is shaped by cultural and socioeconomic forces, but the degrees and patterns of access and attainment demonstrate that class differences and cultural diversity alone do not fully explain why the inequalities of women's education exist and persist [1].

In the sociology of education literature, several explanations--generously termed theories because they amount to partial formulations--have addressed the phenomenon of educational inequalities. The main focus of these explanations has been the function of the educational system in serving the various social

classes, particularly the extent to which the school could be considered a fair instrument for enculturation and social mobility. These theories have not dealt specifically with such indicators of inequality as differential access to educational services, rates of dropping out, and the number of years of education attained, but they have offered formulations that can be extended to these kinds of outcomes.

On the other hand, a number of studies have addressed gender inequalities in educational access and attainment. Yet, they have been remarkably atheoretical, usually characterized by the identification of many independent variables but failing to weave them into a coherent explanatory framework. For instance, Bowman and Anderson, summarizing patterns of educational participation of women in the Third World, say:

> Whether schooling of a daughter is deemed worthwhile will be influenced by perceptions (or expectations) of the effects of schooling on jobs, on acquisition of a "better" husband, on quality of domestic life, on the daughter's personality development, and on the well-being of her children (1980, p. 12).

But they do not ask themselves why it is that female education is considered less important or why it is that the education of women is automatically linked by society to their role as wives or mothers.

Another major synthesis of women's education (Deble, 1980) reports that the high dropout rates for girls in primary and secondary African schools in the mid-70s were due to early marriage, insufficient secondary places, coeducation, the cost of education, the low quality of girls' schools, and the irrelevance of formal education to economic needs. Again, these findings are not integrated into an

explanatory framework to account for their existence and incidence.

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the various mainstream theories about social inequalities in education and to expose their inability to explain gender inequalities. The paper will then examine alternative, i.e., feminist, theories on the specific question of gender-based inequalities and show how these theories differ from the mainstream explanations by bringing into the analysis social actors previously ignored as important in the determination of both social and educational outcomes. The introduction of these new actors is linked to the identification of new concepts about social relationships, concepts that had been taken for granted or assumed to belong only to the world of the "private." The various feminist theories will be reviewed not only in terms of their general arguments about the role of education for women, but also in their answers to five questions suggested by empiral findings [2] regarding women's access and attainment in education: (1) Why are there more illiterate women than men in most societies? (2) Why do men exhibit higher levels of educational attainment than women? (3) Why are women in sex-segregated fields at the university level? (4) Why do more women than men in universities come from wealthy families? and (5) Why is it that women are gaining increasing levels of education throughout most of the world?

Mainstream Theories

The best known theories about social inequalities in education--theories that in the context of this paper will be termed mainstream theories--are those derived from the functionalist (or

consensual) and the conflict (or neo-Marxist) approaches.

The widely-accepted views of Durkheim and Parsons argue that schooling is meritocratic and that success in it depends exclusively on the motivation and the intellectual ability of the individual. Schools sort people out and stratify society, but they do so according to the best method we have yet found: meritocracy. Neither Durkheim (who could not yet see these manifestations) nor Parsons addressed the problems of either unequal access to education or the low years of schooling reached by people of rural origins, oppresed racial groups, and women. But their logic would explain any kind of failure to benefit from schooling as a purely individual failure, caused by conditions pertaining to the individuals themselves (i.e., differences in cognitive and manual abilities), but not due to any systematic injustice generated by the formal educational system.

Within the set of explanations for school failure predicated on individual differences we can include the work of Bernstein, who asserts that certain students bring to school language deficits acquired through socialization in their families. These language deficits include poor vocabularies and limited analytical patterns, which place students with these characteristics in disadvantaged learning positions vis-a-vis their peers (Bernstein, 1960). The contributions by Elder (1965) and Hess and Shipman (1965) are similar although they do not concentrate on language competencies but rather on cognitive ability. According to these three authors, children's thought patterns and exploration are stimulated in varying degrees by their family socialization practices, particularly by maternal behaviors. Some children have mothers who patiently explain to their

children everything they ask and who allow them to learn through exploration of their environment [3]. In contrast, other mothers are incapable of producing explanations for their children and utilize control and discipline over their children's attempts to explore their environment. Bernstein, Elder, and Hess and Shipman identify the more "capable" children as belonging to the upper- or middle-income families and the less "capable" children as living in low-income families, but there do not establish any links between why schools would tend to favor patterns of speech and cognitive development that favor one class of individuals over another. In other words, missing in their analysis are the notions of power and its intentional use. Expanding these arguments to account for social inequalities in education, it could be said that individuals from lower socioeconomic origins are likely to experience difficulties adjusting to the more formal and complex setting provided by the school and that in those cases where difficulties are particularly severe, the student will respond by leaving the school withouth having completed either the primary or the secondary cycle. These theories, however, cannot be used to explain gender differences because they contain nothing in their arguments to account for differences within social classes.

The other set of explanations about inequalities in education, those derived from neo-Marxist analysis [4], identify social classes more explicitly and assert that the school reflects the dominant economic structure in society. The best-known Marxist critique of education, that of Bowles and Gintis (1976), does not address the question of educational failure as much as the question of socialization into dominant and dominated social classes by the school

system. Bowles and Gintis contend that the schools teach the children of the wealthy to be managerial and autonomous while they teach low-class students to be subservient and obedient workers (1976, pp. 132-133). In their words:

> Education must teach [the majority of] people to be properly subordinated and render them efficiently fragmented in consciousness to preclude their getting together to shape their own material existence (p. 130).

While these authors concentrate on the socialization role of the school rather than participation and attainment, their assertions could be extended to the questions of dropping out and attainment because it could be asserted that to the degree the educational system emphasizes the transmission of proper worker attitudes (particularly the acceptance of a lower position in the hierarchy in the process of production) rather than skills, students from lower classes will not be motivated into pursuing higher levels of education and the school will not be especially concerned with making sure that these students complete their education or achieve greater levels of cognitive skills. On the other hand, Bowles and Gintis do consider the phenomenon of school expansion. In the context of U.S. society, they explain expansion as the capitalists' response to the need to produce the workers that the quickly expanding economy of the 19th century demanded. In brief, the expansion did not allow so much for social mobility as for the rapid reproduction of the working class.

Bowles and Gintis' main argument, namely that the school gives differential messages to students from different social classes, receives some refinement in the work of Baudelot and Establet (1971), who assert that the school is not a unitary system but rather

comprises two distinct networks corresponding to the two main social classes: the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The network serving the proletariat not only transmits knowledge that trains students for manual occupations but also consists of schools of poor quality and concomitant low learning.

The neo-Marxist theories have given much attention to social class as a key determinant and have succeeded in providing important macro-level insights about the role of schooling. On the other hand, they provide explanations that have no room for the existence of gender differentiation within the social classes. As a group, these theories would predict that individuals from low social classes would tend to attain different types of schooling and fewer years of schooling than their better-off counterparts. But, as is the case for the functionalist theories, the neo-Marxist explanations of school behavior are gender-blind and unable to explain why inequalities occur within social classes. What neo-Marxist theories do contribute to the understanding of gender inequalities is that determinants of school failure are located not within motivations and abilities of individuals but within processes and objectives of institutions in society. The role of structure, thus, appears as a force of consequence. Another contribution of neo-Marxist theories is the identification of the State as the key institution in generating and maintaining social relations. According to Offe (1985), social policy is the State's manner of affecting the lasting transformation of non-wage laborers into wage laborers. For members of society to function as wage laborers, certain basic reproduction functions must be fulfilled (e.g., in the provision of socialization, health,

education, care for the aged). These domains, says Offe, "must fall within the province of state policy" in order to ensure ruling class control over who is and who is not a wage laborer (p. 89). Offe, then, would see the State as intimately linked to educational processes and objectives. At the same time, he would also see State policies as the reconciliation of "licensed" demands or recognized needs with the perceived "exigencies" or tolerance of the capitalist economy for "unproductive" social expenditures, which would predict that the State will respond to requests for additional or different types of education presented by the subordinate classes without, however, making substantial changes in the way education is socially perceived or rewarded.

We noted before that gender differences in access and attainment are prevalent throughout the Third World. How can we then account for these differences if the existing mainstream theories, whether functionalist or conflict, do not help us?

Let us first briefly summarize the findings regarding gender access and attainment. The various (but not numerous) studies on these questions tend to be crudely empirical. They coincide in distinguishing two main sets of obstacles: those identified as being "school-related" and those classified as "home-related". Within the home-related obstacles such variables as parents' attitudes and aspirations toward their daughters, their socioeconomic level, their years of education, the cultural and religious values of their society, and the number of younger siblings in the household have been identified as consistently associated with decisions to enroll females in schools and to allow them to continue their schooling. Within the

set of school-related obstacles, the variables identified in the literature are distance to school, presence of female teachers in the classroom, "relevant" curriculum, lack of counseling facilities, and gender-segregated curricula in schools.

By separating school- from family-related variables, the existing studies offer an implicit vision of society in which the school and the family seem to operate with autonomy. Such a vision negates the existence of the State as a key institution regulating activities within both the school and the family. It ignores as well that both institutions are dependent upon the State and that, while control by the State may not be hermetic, their degrees of freedom are certainly limited.

Feminist Theories

Feminist theories differ considerably in their identification of the factors responsible for the inferiority of women in society. In consequence they assign both the State and the education system different roles in producing women's equality [5]. The three common classifications of feminism are suitable for our purposes [6]. We will first discuss how these theories explain women's inequality in society and, then, move toward prodiving specific answers to the questions of women's inequality in educational access and attainment identified earlier in this paper. In doing so, we will be extrapolating from these theories and extending their explanations to account specifically for educational inequalities. These extensions, it must be underscored, are not always based on existing literature but are logical extensions of the assertions being made in the various

theories.

The liberal feminist perspective is dominated by the sex-role socialization paradigm. This perspective considers that the social system is essentially just and that all deviations from "desirable" conditions--educational equality included--are due to lack of information about the problems facing women and lack of adequate legislation to deal with them. Liberal feminism sees the State as an essentially benevolent institution that will both design and implement legislation to ensure women's equal access to education and other social and economic rights.

The extension of the liberal philosophy to the problems of female illiteracy would argue, on the one hand, that legislation in favor of women is still imperfect and, on the other hand, that women have been socialized to have low levels of educational aspirations. The lower levels of educational attainment by women would also be attributed to traditional socialization practices and sexual discrimination practices in the school (e.g., stereotypes in textbooks, higher teacher expectations toward boys) that the State has not yet been able to combat successfully. Similarly, the relatively low participation of women in universities and their concentrated presence in a few fields would be seen as the cumulative result of discrimination and socialization of women that trains them to "fear success" (Horner, 1969) and discourages them from seeking challenging careers. In response to why more wealthy women than men benefit from tertiary education, liberal feminism might respond by saying that wealthier parents tend to have more education, and, being more educated, tend to be less prejudiced against women and thus more likely to promote and

support their daughters' aspirations for advanced schooling. And in reply to why women are gaining more access to education over time, liberal feminism would say that this is a manifestation of the State's ideology of citizenry, an ideology that applies equally to both men and women.

Liberal feminist answers are not totally satisfying because they do not dwell with the underlying causes for female discrimination. Why is it that men and women are given different socialization messages in the first place? Why is that socialization practices persistently discriminate against women rather than men? If discrimination has existed for a long time, why has the State tolerated it? Ramirez and Weiss (1979) see the State evolving into a benign and progressive macro-institution that is promoting an increasingly wider and fairer definition of "citizenry" throughout the world. This definition is said to encompass now women as individuals entitled to full rights. According to this benign interpretation of the State, we should see the gradual incorporation of women as the product of modern State ideologies that seek to incorporate new categories of individuals into its polity. Ramirez and Weiss show through multiple regression analysis that higher levels of State authority and power result in greater participation of women in secondary education (see p. 244), but in a parallel study, Ramirez and Rubison (1979) also find that the impact of higher levels of State authority upon the participation of women and men in education is much higher than that on women alone (compare the results on p. 76). These differential impacts, however, are not discussed. And yet, they could be taken as an indication that the subordination of women continues,

except that it has been taken to higher levels.

In my opinion, the interpretation of the State as a benevolent actor cannot, for a variety of reasons, be taken very far: (a) It does not distinguish between symbolic and serious acts by the State (e.g., not every policy that is stated in a constitution is in fact implemented). A report on the education of women in Asia and the Pacific notes that the constitutions in all countries of the region "enshrine" the principle of equal educational opportunity and that national development plans have even reflected concern regarding the disadvantaged status of girls, but that "with the exception of China, no policy has directly attempted to counter sociocultural barriers by conscienticizing and mobilizing the community on a sufficiently large scale to make a tangible impact on community attendance and participation" (APEID, 1986, p. 26). In the case of Tanzania--reportedly one of the most progressive developing countries in terms of educational policy--equality of the sexes in education was proclaimed as soon as the socialist regime took over; yet, the participation of female students in post-secondary education decreased from 17% in 1970-71 to 13% in 1974 (Desta, 1979)). (b) It does not account for the serious disparities that can be observed in some countries; i.e., why are some States more progressive than others? or conversely, why have some States achieved so little for women? (c) It ignores material causes that might be leading the State and other institutions in society to rationally discriminate against women. (d) Most damaging of all, it explains some changes in the gender-role definitions as a product of State actions rather than the consequence of the mobilization and demands of feminist groups; so even the

liberation of women is paternalistically interpreted: it is the result of something given to them and not the fruit of their own demands. In short, the explanations that say that the State is now doing its best to improve the conditions of women are suspect because they are overly optimistic and underestimate the fact that serious changes in the conditions of women cannot derive easily from the institution that has traditionally permitted the subordination and oppression of women.

The second well-known feminist perspective, radical feminism, considers that the main cause of women's subordination originates from power relations based on sexual differences (mainly, the woman's ability to conceive, gestate, and give birth to children). On the basis of women's reproductive tasks that set women apart as mothers, an ideological system is constructed. This system--known as patriarchy--defines men as superior to women and is defended and maintained through an intricate web of values, norms, laws, and institutions [7]. The radical feminist perspective would see the State as a key agent in the perpetuation of women's subordination via its strong defense of the family as the core unit of society. This perspective would argue that the family, as currently defined, acts as the main locus for the reproduction of the sexual division of labor. The defense of the family, then, has been associated with the identification of women as mothers and housekeepers, thus creating an artificial but overwhelming "private" realm for women and a "public" world for men. To the extent that the State needs the family to play a specific mission, and given that women have a particular role in it, it would follow that it would be very unlikely for the State to

initiate a process of change in which women's conditions could change substantially.

Expanding the radical feminist perspective to education, the higher levels of illiteracy among women would be explained as resulting from the State's reliance on women for basically reproductive tasks which require only a minimum of skills and knowledge, many times absorbed through informal or nonformal education. In countries with low levels of development, motherhood is defined (socially although not officially) as not even requiring literacy. Regarding the fact that women attain fewer years of education than men, the radical feminist perspective would say that women do not receive priority from the State because, having assigned women the reproductive tasks, the State will concentrate on improving first the education of men. The concentration of women in a few "traditionally female" fields at the university level (whether by choice or due to lack of alternatives), would be explained in terms of the influence of the patriarchal system that inculcates upon women the value of domestic responsibilities, with the consequence that they choose careers that tend to be extensions of domestic roles or that will not conflict with them. The radical perspective would not have a clear explanation for the presence of wealthier as opposed to poor women at the university level. And this is a weakness of this perspective, because it fails to grasp class relations while defining the gender problem solely on the basis of ideological determinants.

The third feminist perspective, <u>socialist feminism,</u> would see an interconnection between ideological and economic forces, in which with patriarchy and capitalism reinforce each other. The radical

perspective would also call attention to the family and see it as a source of oppression, but an oppression that is constantly reinforced by conditions in the labor market. The State would be seen as intimately linked to the mode of production and thus (a) unlikely to alter the position of classes or other groups in the economic sphere, and (b) likely to favor capitalists and entrepreneurs over workers regardless of gender. Since women represent both part of the reserve labor force and an inexpensive way to reproduce (physically and socially) the labor force, the State acts jointly and closely with economic interests to keep women in a subordinate position. As a result, changes in the role of women, independent from changes in both the mode of production and patriarchal structures predicated on the inferiority of women, would be insignificant.

Expanding the socialist feminist perspective to account for the existence and persistence of gender inequalities in access to and attainment in schooling, the following explanations can be derived: The large number of illiterate women in the world can be attributed to women's double role as reproducer of children and the family, and as workers in the reserve labor force. Their time is generally taken by domestic and to a lesser extent by remunerated work; thus they are not available for schooling, especially in societies where social reproduction depends heavily on subsistence production. The fact that women have lower levels of education than men would be understood in terms of women's devalued role as workers, which in turn tends to congregate many women in the informal sector of the economy or in low-status jobs which generally do not require high levels of education. Their presence in sex-segregated fields at the university

would be attributed to (1) the social definition of women as primarily mothers and hence responsible first and foremost for the welfare of their families and (2) the labor market conditions that in fact offer women fewer and weaker rewards than those offered to men and thus make it more profitable for parents to invest in sons than daughters. The presence of more wealthy women than wealthy men at the university level would be explained by socialist feminism as the reflection that gender and class interact with each other: daughters of middle- and upper-class parents are offered better opportunities in the labor market due to the better social connections; moreover, middle- and upper-class parents can invest more in daughters because at higher levels of income, the education of the daughter represents a less risky investment. And in reply to why more women are gaining more access to education all over the world, the socialist feminist perspective would argue that as countries become more industrially advanced, labor becomes less predicated on physical strength. Thus, women can fill more positions in the labor force, which in turn creates a greater female demand for education. From the socialist feminist perspective, there would be a basic contradiction betwen high-level technology and patriarchy. Patriarchy would tend to keep women in the home; technology would tend to incorporate women in new capacities. Occupations based on sophisticated technologies, being new, would be less subject to gender stereotypes, thus being easier for women to enter. Therefore, through new technologies, a new space might be made available to women.

Searching for the Best Theoretical Fit

The review of empirical findings vis-a-vis existing theories regarding educational access and attainment has shown us that mainstream theories as unable to explain gender differences inasmuch as they ignore them and concentrate exclusively on class or economic-based differences. In contrast, as has been seen above, all three feminist theories are able to provide explanations accounting for women's lower rates of educational access and attainment. The critical question now becomes, which is the most appropriate theory, the one that best accounts for the reality that can be observed?

The literature on school participation and attainment by girls in developing countries shows that family decisions are powerful determinants of the probability that daughters will enroll, attend, and continue in school. What can be observed is that fathers, usually with the agreement of mothers, assign girls in the household more domestic responsibilities than they give to boys. In the case of poor households, girls represent important labor that the family cannot afford to forego by allowing them to go to school. Thus, even if the girls are enrolled, patterns of poor attendance leading to dropping out tend to emerge. In the case of girls from better-off families, parents are able to afford their daughters presence in school, but norms about the appropriate role of women (i.e., being married and having children) discourage parents from investing significantly in the education of their daughters. Women who reach the university level are not only very few but, in comparison with their male counterparts, tend to belong disproportionately to middle- and upper-social classes.

In making sense of these patterns, one interpretation would be to consider them purely as manifestations of individual families. Yet, we know that the State can and in fact does regulate family behaviors. By not acting on family practices, the State implicitly condones them. And if it acts in favor of the family but not in favor of the female individual, the State cannot be considered a benign or even neutral institution.

If we look for reasons for which the State would want to respect the status quo, the belief that women are inferior to men could not persist independent of some reason that makes this belief a good choice. If this belief were simply anchored in a nonmaterial cultural tradition, we would expect to see a great deal of variability in the status of women across societies and across time since presumably discrimination criteria themselves would depend on fads and thus be very unstable. And yet, we find a remarkable consistency in the identification of women as inferior. To be sure, women in most societies are not slaves and many lead satisfying lives. However, were we to compare the range of career, occupation, and life possibilities open to women and men as groups, in the balance men would emerge as the more benefited. Women do receive lower salaries in the public world and they can fulfill more duties at home precisely because they are less competitive than men in the outside world. The ideology of women's inferiority develops its own dynamics and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy as women are also assigned inferior economic roles. The economic/ideology connection is there and it is clear that a theory of women's conditions must take both forces into account.

An event that remains to be examined is the expansion of schooling and the slow, but increasing access of women to education. Why is the State opening some avenues to women? At least three reasons can be identified, all of them compatible with the socialist feminist perspective. The first has to do with changes in technology that have eased, though not eliminated women's domestic chores in many countries and that have rendered industrial and service work less dependent on physical strength. The increasing incorporation of women into the labor force would call for greater levels of education for them. Although not socialist feminists, Wright and Martin make assertions totally compatible with the above arguments. They say:

> Concrete class structures are always complex amalgams of multiple, differet relations of exploitation. Capitalist societies cannot be analyzed concretely as simple embodiments of the abstract capitalist mode of production; they are always complex combinations of a variety of mechanisms of exploitation and accompanying forms of class relations. In order to predict the effects of technological change on the transformation of class structures, therefore, one has to understand the effects of technical change on each of these forms of class relations in the class structure as a whole, not simply on capitalist class relations. (1987, p. 24.)

Note that the greater participation of women in the labor force need not be construed as one which would take place under conditions of sexual equality. Here the tie between economic conditions and the State would continue but under other forms.

A second reason is caused by the dialectics between the State's official value--equality of citizens--and the popular belief that education serves social and economic equality. The State today is in no position to discriminate openly against women, thus women find a space they are certainly utilizing. The expansion of schooling,

within this reason, could be explained as an instance of what Offe calls the "compatibility problem," or the State's need to react consistently to the two poles of the needs of labor and capital (1985, p. 95).

A third reason, explaining not so much the rate of school expansion, but the fact the State is willing to permit it, has to do with the content of schooling: the school system does not offer knowledge that challenges the sexual division of labor or gender constructs of what is legitimate and proper for men and women. There is evidence indicating many school textbooks in developing countries contain negative messages for female identity, that often teachers consciously or unconsciously discriminate in favor of boys, that the school experience affects the career aspirations of boys but leaves unmodified the aspirations of girls (UNESCO, 1979; Deem, 1980; Kelly and Elliott, 1982; Stromquist, 1987). This being the case, expansion of education does not have to be equated with a questioning of patriarchal beliefs. Hence, the State can engage in the expansion of schooling as a relatively harmless extension of human rights.

Conclusion

Mainstream theories about inequality of education are gender-blind and thus of little usefulness in explainining gender inequalities in education. They take social class as the main variable of interest and fail to deal with gender as a major social construct. Feminist perspectives coincide in considering women as the main referent, but they vary a great deal regarding the role they attribute to the State, the family, and the school system in the

process of change to attain women's equality.

Regarding the questions of access and attainment, the three feminist theories under review offer explanations for the present conditions characterizing women's inequality in education. However, it is the socialist feminist perspective, which most successfully accounts not only for the existence of the conditions under review, but also the pace and nature of these conditions. In consequence, it is evident that socialist feminism is making a contribution to the sociology of education and that we must continue to see links between the school and the economy and between ideology and material conditions.

A socialist feminist theory of gender inequalities would not see an unalterable situation of women. The world is certainly dynamic and the mere existence of feminism today shows that new social actors emerge over time. As societies become more technologically complex, greater levels of education are needed; at the same time, occupations become less dependent on physical strength. Because of this, in more advanced societies, access to post-graduate education becomes the most sensitive indicator of women's possibilities for participation in decision making in public and private bureaucracies. And it is at this level that the question of gender equality in education must be considered.

What a feminist theory would say, however, is that it is very unlikely that educational gender inequalities will wither away as long as patriarchy and the capitalist mode of production reinforce each other. It would also say that the role of the State in the provision of educational services leaves untouched social and sexual relations

in society. Today, given the expansion of the educational system, differences between girls and boys are not to be seen in the segregated curriculum as much as the in the presence of imbalanced treatment of women in textbooks and subjects such as history, and particularly in extracurricular activities and in the general organizational life of the school. Therefore, the State, by omission and less by commission, is not neutral and is likely to adapt only very slowly, making only those concessions that it is forced to make by social actors interested in the advancement of women. Those social actors, it should be made clear, are not part of the State but have enough influence to press it into new directions.

NOTES

[1] There have been few studies that specifically distinguish inequalities due to gender from those due to class or race. A study by Rosemberg (1985) using census and national household survey data in Brazil found that within racial groups there was equal educational opportunity between sexes, but the analysis of the association between educational level and income indicated that the discrimination by gender was more pronounced than the discrimination by race, indicating thus that the school system perhaps discriminates less than the society at large.

[2] These findings are drawn from a review of approximately 80 empirical studies dealing with the determinants of participation and attainment of women in developing countries (Stromquist, 1987, mimeo).

[3] These arguments are quite similar to those advanced by Hagen (1963) in explaining why certain nations developed more than others. Hagen traces the emergence of the "uncreative personality"--the persons who shy away from experimentation and innovation--to parental socialization practices that do not allow for the children's initiative and persistently give them arbitrary instructions to guide their behaviors.

[4] The term meo-Marxist is not used pejoratively but simply to underscore the fact that these approaches are extensions of Marxist thought, since Marx himself did to not deal with the school system.

[5] Both mainstream and feminist theories have emerged in advanced industrialized countries and thus refer to events and conditions in those societies. In consequence, their application to Third World settings must be done with caution.

[6] This classification is based on Jaggar's (1983), who identifies three main perspectives: liberal, radical, and socialist feminism. Her book presents a detailed discussion of these perspectives and their main exponents.

[7] Although generally known as patriarchy, this ideology can assume an extreme form as in machismo, whereby men see women basically as objects of sex and thus see no reason to take care of their offspring, or the somewhat milder form of patriarchy per se, whereby men adopt the position of "breadwinners" and assign women the role of keeping children and house for them.

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